DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 405 730 FL 024 397

AUTHOR Saucedo, Leticia
TITLE Parents' Attitudes towards Dual Language Immersion Programs.
PUB DATE [97]
NOTE 9p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Bilingual Education; Cultural Awareness; Educational Attitudes; Elementary Education; English (Second Language); *Immersion Programs; Language Attitudes; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Participation; *Peer Relationship; *Second Languages; Spanish; Surveys; Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS *Two Way Bilingual Education

ABSTRACT

A study investigated parent attitudes toward a dual-language (Spanish/English) immersion program of bilingual education, in which both English-speakers and non-English-speakers are participating students and English is used no more than 50 percent of the time for instruction. The 20-item (agree/disagree format) survey elicited opinions from 200 parents concerning four program areas: cultural appreciation among peers; students' academic progress; the importance of learning a second language; and the importance of parent volunteerism. Results indicate most parents had a favorable attitude about dual-language immersion; over 90 percent were satisfied with the program and would recommend it to other families. Learning a second language was perceived as important by 97 percent. A similar percentage agreed that all schools should teach a second language and that children should speak English and Spanish fluently. While 97 percent were satisfied with their children's second language learning, only 95 percent were satisfied with their native language development. Most were also satisfied with their academic progress and enhanced cross-cultural attitudes and appreciation. Most supported parental involvement, although only about half had volunteered. Contains 11 references. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 405 730

PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS

LETICIA SAUCEDO

FL 024 397

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Saucedo

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PARENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS DUAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS

Leticia Saucedo

Dual language immersion programs are not new. Since the 1960s there had been some bilingual education programs with similar characteristics as those found in two-way bilingual programs we know of today. However, it was in the mid 1980s when two-way bilingual education attracted refurbished interest and as a result, many schools began to adopt the approach. This interest emerged as a result of increased attention to foreign language learning and on current research findings regarding effective programs for educating language minority students.

Dual language immersion, as defined by the Chicago Board of Education's department of language and cultures, is where the non-English language is used for at least fifty percent of the student's instructional day. Both English and non-English speakers are participants in the same classroom receiving periods of all content instruction in one language. Typical goals for two-way immersion programs include: developing high levels of proficiency in both first and second language, performing at or above grade level in academic areas in both languages and demonstrating positive cross-cultural attitudes.

There seems to be a continuing debate regarding the importance of special language programs that strive to develop dual language proficiency in students attending the public schools. There are those who believe that in today's multiethnic society and global economy, it is essential for all students to learn a variety of languages so as to promote cultural diversity, increase financial opportunities, and effectively provide for the communication of various cultures and populations. Hence, giving these students the abilities of becoming well integrate citizens while co-habituating harmoniously among ethnolinguistic groups.

However, there are others who believe that English should be the exclusive language in which students receive instruction. Many of these language majority monolinguals believe that the maintenance and development of the non-English language will replicate the mythical tower of Babel causing linguistic divisions among it's citizens and eventually dividing our nation into pockets of ethnolinguistic populations.

The increase of language minority students in our schools has presented educators with the challenge to find ways of meeting the needs of these groups of students in accomplishing the content standards of subject matter areas. Educators, researchers, policy makers and special interest groups have exchanged ideas and opinions on the effectiveness and appropriateness of language programs and practices for these of students.

However, the acknowledgement and representation of the opinions of the parents is minimal relative to the important role they play in their children's academic growth. At local levels, parents have taken a more active function in schools aside from volunteering in class. They have become essential components in the Local School Councils, in committees and organizations that have direct implication on changes in their children's schools.

ED 394 717

Active parents have been part of the backbone of many successful programs. They are an important source of information regarding the social, academic and linguistic needs of their children. Therefore, their opinions can serve to guide schools as to what areas the program needs to be strengthen.

Perhaps one of the most important elements about two-way immersion programs is that they are often initiated by groups of concerned parents. Such had been the case of the very first immersion program conducted in St. Lambert, Canada by Dr. Wallace Lambert and colleague Tucker in 1965 (Craig, 1995). The parents were dissatisfied because their children's French was so poor that they couldn't even communicate with their French-Canadian neighbors. The parents had formed the St. Lambert Bilingual School Study Group and set about finding a better methods of teaching their children French (Craig, 1995).

Lambert and Tucker's immersion plan called for a detailed study of the linguistic, cognitive, and attitudinal development of children in a pilot and a follow-up experimental class. Control classes of children were carefully matched for measured intelligence and social-class backgrounds in accordance with conventional English-Canadian and French-Canadian academic programs (1972). Also, the experimental and control classes were comparable in terms of parental attitudes towards the French-Canadian people and culture. Moreover, all of the parents were equally motivated to have their children learn French.

At the end of a two-year process of parental and local community involvement with the public school system, the first immersion kindergarten class of 26 English-speaking children was established. By the end of fourth grade, the students had developed high levels of proficiency in French. Learning through French had no negative effects on the children's English development.

In the United States the search for appropriate language instructional programs continued. While parents in St. Lambert, Canada were developing the French immersion instruction for their English-speaking children, teachers in Dade County Florida were experimenting with the enrichment bilingual education in Spanish and English for both Spanish and English speaking children. 350 children in the first, second and third grades entered a special bilingual program at their school. Evaluations of the program showed that all the children made steady progress in both languages, mastered subject matter content equally well in both languages, and developed a bicultural understanding of children in the other language group (Lindholm, 1988).

Outside of Canada, the first total immersion program in the United States was established in 1971 in Culver City, California, designed to teach Spanish to English-speaking students (Smith, 1988). This program was modeled on the successful St. Lambert program. Given the geographical and demographic characteristics of Southern California, the program planners decided that the foreign language would be Spanish.

Evaluators of the Culver City Spanish total immersion program noted that because only English-speaking students were present in the classroom, they "reinforced each other's incorrect usage" (Craig, 1995).

As a result of the positive achievements of these alternative bilingual programs, many schools began to implement these approaches. Schools began to adopt two-way immersion programs with classes composed of English-speaking and non-English speaking children. There are many program styles of the two-way immersion approach. These choices include differences in enrollment area (neighborhood-based or magnet schools), method of separating the languages of instruction (by school subject, by class period, day of the week or by teacher), and the program model selected (early, total or early partial immersion) (Hernandez-Chavez, 1984). This flexibility in the implementation of two-way immersion instruction can be considered one of its strengths, allowing a school to tailor its program to fit local community conditions, preferences, and language resources. In order to tailor an efficient program for a school, opinions and sentiments of those directly involved (students, parents, community and school staff) should be considered.

Literature on parents' attitudes towards dual language immersion is scarce. However, the available literature that was reviewed indicates that many successful immersion programs counted with strong parental support and participation.

There is a growing concern in finding instructional programs that will address the academic needs of the increasingly language minority student population in our schools. This concern has been the topic of debate which aims to delineate the most effective criteria necessary to help language minority students achieve the optimal level of language and academic proficiency. The debate has been intensified with the wide range of opinions from educators, researchers, policy makers and special interest groups as to the appropriate language programs and practices for these students. Nonetheless, very little information regarding parents' opinions and attitudes towards adopted practices and language program models has been considered when making program policy decisions for these students.

Educating a child is a shared responsibility between the school,community and parents. Together they form an integrative and instrumental team directly involved in addressing the academic and socio-cultural needs of the child so as to prepare them to become viable citizens that can effectively function in our increasingly multicultural and multilingual society. Even though parents are instrumental in their children's education, not enough information reports on their attitudes towards language program models.

For several years parents of language minority students sought to place their children in bilingual education programs. However, many of these traditional bilingual programs served as a subtractive form of bilingualism rather than an additive or maintenance language model. Dissatisfied with the eventual loss of their children's native language and culture, parents sought schools with language program models that would maintain their

children's native language while developing second language and academic proficiency. Alternatively, two-way immersion programs met the demands of these parents. These programs serve the needs of both language minority and language majority students. Many successful two-way immersion programs count with a high number of active parent involvement and collaboration within the school.

Strong parental support and activism is a crucial link in the success of a two-way immersion programs. Not only do these parents dedicate time and effort volunteering in their child's class, they also serve on community-based committees, write grants for special programs and function as parent volunteer coordinators. The research conducted on parent's attitudes and opinions of this language model program is relatively minimal compared to the important role the parents partake in the daily operations of the school. More research should reflect the parents perspective as to their satisfaction with the two-way immersion program their child is attending so as to create more available opinions to inform the policy process.

Procedures

Teacher developed survey entitled "Parents' attitudes towards dual language immersion" was designed to measure parents' attitudes towards the dual language immersion program their children are enrolled in at school. The survey was divided into four categories.

1. Cultural appreciation among peers.
2. The academic progress of the students.
3. The importance of learning a second language.
4. The importance of parent volunteerism.

There where a total of 20 statements. The first category contained two statements, the second category contained nine statements, the third statement contained six statements and the fourth statement contained three statements. The instrument was pilot tested on ten parents not included in the study.

The school population is about 65% Spanish-speaking and 35% English speaking. This study includes the available sample of 200 parents of children attending Inter-American school. 61 usable returns were received from the parents, which represents 31% of the population sample.

The "Parents attitudes towards dual language immersion" survey was distributed to 200 parents within the school. Attached to the survey was a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and containing instructions for completing and returning the survey. They were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement by circling the corresponding response.

The findings were then tabulated in terms of comparing frequencies occurring in different categories. The CHI Square test will be employed at the .05 level of confidence to determine that statistical significance of the findings.

Findings

The data in the Table show the majority of the parents had a favorable attitude toward dual language immersion program. 97% agreed that they were satisfied with the program and 93% of the parents would recommend it to other families. The satisfaction with the program may be relevant to the fact that parents' attitudes towards the benefits of learning two languages is high, 97%; and 97% agree that all schools should teach a non-English language. Even though 84% of the parents indicate to have materials accessible for their children in the second language, 97% of the parents encouraged their children to learn a second language.

A significant number of parents (97%) agreed that it is important for children to speak English and Spanish fluently. However, 95% were satisfied with their child's native language development while 97% of the parents were satisfied with their child's second language development. Regarding self-esteem, 97% of the parents agreed that being able to speak two languages helped their child's self-esteem.

Regarding classroom grouping of students, 94% of the parents agreed that non-English speakers and English speakers can mutually learn from each other in the same classroom. However, 89% of the parents agreed that the presence of children who are just learning to speak Spanish enhanced their child's progress in school, while 95% of the parents indicated that the presence of children who are just learning to speak English enhanced their child's progress in school. Nevertheless, 97% of the parents were satisfied with their child's academic progress, and 98% of the parents concurred that cross-cultural attitudes and appreciation is enhanced through dual language immersion.

On the issue of parent participation, 94% agreed that there is an active parent involvement at their child's school. Although 53% of the parents indicated that they have volunteered in their child's class, 97% believe that parent involvement can strengthen the dual language program at the school.

N = 61	Parents' Responses (%)	
1. Are you familiar with the program of English and Spanish instruction at your child's school? (Dual language immersion)	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
2. Are you satisfied with this dual language immersion model?	Agree 93% *	Disagree 7%
3. Would you recommend the dual language immersion program to other families?	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
4. Do you think your child will benefit from learning two languages?	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
5. Do you encourage your child to learn a second language?	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
6. Do you have materials accessible for your child in the second language?	Agree 84% *	Disagree 16%
7. Do you think it is important for children to speak English fluently?	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
8. Do you think it is important for your child to speak and use Spanish fluently?	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
9. Should school teach all children a non-English language?	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
10. Do you think non-English speakers and English speakers can mutually learn from each other in the same classroom?	Agree 94% *	Disagree 6%
11. Has the presence of children who are just learning to speak English enhanced your child's progress in school?	Agree 95% *	Disagree 5%
12. Has the presence of children who are just learning to speak Spanish enhanced your child's progress in school?	Agree 89% *	Disagree 11%
13. Do you think cross-cultural attitudes and appreciation is enhanced through dual language immersion?	Agree 98% *	Disagree 2%
14. Do you think being able to speak two languages helps your child's self-esteem?	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
15. Are you satisfied with your child's native language development?	Agree 95% *	Disagree 5%
16. Are you satisfied with your child's second language development?	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
17. Are you satisfied with your child's academic progress?	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
18. Do you feel there is an active parent involvement at your child's school?	Agree 94% *	Disagree 6%
19. Do you think parent involvement can strengthen the dual language program at your child's school?	Agree 97% *	Disagree 3%
20. Have you volunteered in your child's class?	Agree 53%	Disagree 47%

* Statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence

REFERENCES

Brandenbur-Ayres, S. (1990). Working with parents. Module 4. Bilingual/ESOL special education collaboration and reform project. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 328 093)

Craig, B.A. (1995). Two-way Foreign Language Immersion Programs: A Handbook for Parents and Teachers. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 239 509).

Careaga, R. (1988). Parent Involvement: A resource for the education of limited English proficient students. Program information guide series. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 337 036)

Christian, Donna. "Two-way immersion education: Students learning through two languages." Modern Language Journal, 1996, 80: 66-76.

Genesee, F. (1984). Historical and theoretical foundations of immersion education as an educational approach for language minority students in the United States. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 239 509).

Hernandez-Chavez, E. (1984). The inadequacy of English immersion education as an educational approach for language minority students in the United States. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 239 509).

Lambert, W.E. (1981). An overview of issues in immersion education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 239 509).

Lindholm, K.J. (1988). The Edison elementary School Bilingual Immersion Program: Student Progress after One year of implementation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 298 765).

Perez, C.L. (1995). Elementary Bilingual and ESL Education Programs and their effectiveness within schools. A descriptive study, teaching methods, and strategies. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 388 036).

Smith, S. (1988). The Second Language Acquisition Process in Immersion Contexts: Theory and Research. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED 345 491).

Torres, M.E. (1988). Attitudes of Bilingual Education Parents toward language learning and curriculum and instruction. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED 309 203).